

The Great Traveler

Summary	Students will imagine themselves transforming into a bird (American avocet), then picture the migration journey that bird takes.
Objectives	Students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify the parts of a bird;• List ways that migrating birds find their way on their migratory route;• Describe the migration route of the American avocet.
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Copy of the migration journey• Journals• Writing materials
Background	<p>See <i>Migration Views</i> background information. American avocets are among the largest migrating shorebirds. Because they are large, they can only migrate short distances. They do, however, migrate in large groups of hundreds to thousands of avocets. Most of the avocets found around the Great Salt Lake can be found there from the end of March until September or October. They spend their winters in Tepic, Mexico, a coastal area of western Mexico from around October/November to April/March of the next year. When in the wetlands of the Great Salt Lake, avocets eat the brine shrimp in the lake, as well as other invertebrates found in the water and soil. They will also sometimes feed on the plants associated with wetlands such as sago pondweed, saltgrass and bulrushes. When in the estuaries and wetlands in Mexico their food includes similar invertebrates and plants. Avocets are wading birds, but are also good swimmers, using their partially webbed feet to swim. They usually migrate at night. When not migrating at night, they will often feed instead.</p>
Time Involved	20 minutes
Utah Core	Standard V, Objectives 2a-c, 4b Language Arts: Standard I, Objectives 1a, 1b; Standard VI, Objectives 1a, 1b, 2b, 3b; Standard VII, Objectives 1a, 1b, 2a-e, 2g, 2i
Literature Connections	<p>Carlstrom, Nancy White. <u>Catching the Wind</u>. Mulberry Books. 1994. A book about geese and other birds.</p> <p>Cherry, Lynn. <u>Flute's Journey</u>. Gulliver Green. 1997. Follow the life of a wood thrush from Maryland to a Central American rainforest. Although the wood thrush is not a wetland bird, the story of migration is wonderful.</p>
Preparation	None

The Great Traveler, cont'd

Activity

Ask your students to get comfortable and close their eyes. Tell them that they will soon be going on an imaginary journey to far away places where they have probably never been. But before starting on this journey, they will be changing their bodies, and turning into birds, since they will be undertaking a migration journey.

Tell them they will have to listen very closely while they have their eyes closed. Then read them the following story:

Imagine that slowly, one part of your body at a time is changing into a bird. First your feet are becoming long and thin, and look - you only have 4 toes, and they are partially webbed! Your legs are also getting much longer and thinner than they were. Next your body is becoming lighter, as your bones become hollow and fill with air. Your nose and mouth are changing into one body part - a beak that is very long, and curved up. Your eyes are getting much larger in your skull, enabling you to see farther than you have ever seen before. Your arms and fingers are becoming wings you can use to fly thousands of miles. And finally feathers sprout and cover your whole body. Now you are ready to begin your journey - you are an American avocet, a large migratory shorebird.

Your journey as an American avocet begins at the end of winter, in Marismas Nacionales, Mexico, a coastal swamp with many invertebrates for you to eat during the winter. The weather is changing, and the days are starting to get longer, and it is time for you to move on. It is nighttime, but this is the best time for your migration. With just a few flaps of your wings, you, and thousands of avocets around you, are airborne. You watch the Mexican wetlands that were your home for a few months grow smaller and smaller below you as you rise into the sky. As you fly, you follow the Mexican coastline for a while before heading slightly east. Using the stars and the gravitational pull of the earth to guide you, you eventually reach the Salton Sea in California. Although you can fly for long distances without stopping, you still must stop to rest and eat every so often. Your stomach is starting to rumble - no wonder - you burned off a lot of fat for energy and now you weigh much less than you did this morning! The Salton Sea is large enough that there is plenty of room for you and your partners in flight to land.

After finding your stopover spot, you come in for a landing. Sweeping your bill back and forth through the water, you gorge yourself on the many invertebrates living in the wetland. Afterwards, you take some time to rest before taking off again on your journey.

You travel like this for hundreds and hundreds of miles, stopping when you need to rest and eat, then continuing on your journey. Finally, you reach your destination - the Great Salt Lake! This will be your home for at least 5 months. Here you will lay eggs and raise your young until they are ready to migrate back to Mexico along with you.

Your time as an avocet has now come to an end. Your feathers disappear, and your arms and legs reappear, and you become you once again. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes.

After you have read the story to your students, have students share how they felt on their journey as an avocet. Have them draw a picture of their favorite time on their journey. Also ask them the following questions: Why do birds migrate? What clues do you think they use to find their way? Is it all instinct, or are there physical clues that help them out along the way? What dangers do they think birds face when migrating? Is there anything people can do to help migratory birds?

The Great Traveler, cont'd

Extensions

Place a map of North America in your classroom where everyone can see. Place a pin in Mexico, and one at the eastern edge of the Great Salt Lake. Tell your students that they are going to track the movements of American avocets migrating either north or south, depending on the time of year you are doing this activity. Each day, move the pin representing the avocets along their migration journey. At each stop, ask your students to write in their journals a paragraph or two about what the avocets did on that day - what they saw, if they stopped and ate, what went on in the flock, etc. Ask some students to share their stories with the class.

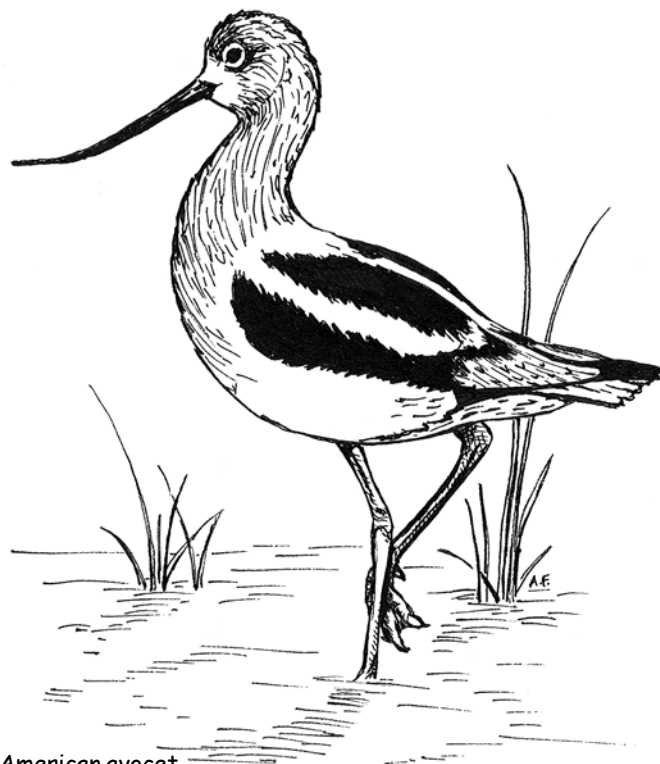
Assessment

Ask your students to draw a picture of a bird, labeling all the appropriate bird parts, such as beak, feet, large eyes, etc. They can create their own bird with its own specific characteristics - they do not need to draw a real bird. Then have them make up a story about their bird's migration route - where does it go? What clues does it use to find its way? How often does it stop to rest? You can put up a map of North and South America on the wall, and let your students go up to the map to decide where their bird travels.

Helpful Websites

See websites for *Migration Views*.

Also: <http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/htm96/map617/ra2250.html>



American avocet